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ABSTRACT

The specific intention of this study was to determine whether samples of disadvantaged students showed positive self-images (as had been shown by some of previous researches) and whether these are maintained when disadvantaged children move out of their neighborhood schools to the more integrated environment of the high school. Seven hundred and seven subjects from an urban school system used in the study were comprised of 309 disadvantaged students (138 in elementary school, 171 in secondary school; 184 boys, 125 girls) and 398 advantaged students (186 elementary, 212 secondary; 199 boys, 199 girls)--the criterion of "disadvantage" having been defined according to family income (less than $4,000 per annum), welfare aid status, and housing in low-rent or subsidized tenements. A self-perception instrument using 40 bipolar traits expressed in sentence form were presented to the subjects. An analysis of variance statistical design was applied to the index scores obtained. The results showed that disadvantaged children of all ages had higher self concepts than advantaged children, but that disadvantaged high school students were not as high in self concept as disadvantaged children at the elementary school level. Tables of test results are appended. (RJ)

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Abstract

Self Concepts of Disadvantaged and Advantaged Students*

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Self concept scores were obtained from disadvantaged and advantaged students in elementary and secondary schools. It was the specific intention of the present study to determine whether other samples of disadvantaged students showed positive self-images -- as indicated by preliminary research -- and whether these are maintained when disadvantaged children move out of their neighborhood schools to the more integrated environment of the high school. The results showed that disadvantaged children of all ages have higher self concepts than advantaged children but that disadvantaged high school students are not as high in self concept as disadvantaged children at the elementary school level.

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Self Concepts of Disadvantaged and Advantaged Students

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Although some of the research (Witty, 1967)and opinion is on the side of negative self-images for disadvantaged children, there is a growing body of evidence indicating that this is not necessarily the case. Carter (1968) discovered that Mexican-American youths in one area of California do not perceive themselves more negatively than their Anglo-Saxon peers. On the contrary, it is the Anglo group which perceives Mexican-American in negative ways and so assumes that disadvantaged youths see themselves in the same light. Carter's conclusion is that Mexican-Americans have their own peer groups to which they relate and other social support; therefore, they do not rate themselves on their standing in "Anglo" society and so do not have negative self concepts. Greenberg and her associates (1965) found similar results in a severely deprived environment of New York, as did the Soares & Soares research (1969a, 1969b) among segregated disadvantaged elementary school children in a Connecticut city.

Part of the explanation for positive self concepts among the disadvantaged is probably involved in social learning principles. Many disadvantaged children associate only with other disadvantaged children and modeling agents in their communities, home, and neighborhood schools. Therefore, they are reinforced by their family, friends, and teachers who, in turn, may generally expect less of them in terms of achievement and socially approved behavior.

However, once such children leave the insularity of their environments and enter into the more pressurizing world of the integrated high school with its greater competition, can the disadvantaged child maintain his positive self-perception? This was the focus of the present study. More specifically, this research was concerned with testing the following null hypotheses:

(1) There is no significant difference in self-concept scores between disadvantaged children in elementary school and advantaged children in elementary school.

(2) There is no significant difference in self-concept scores between disadvantaged students in secondary school and advantaged children in secondary school.

(3) There is no significant difference in self-concept scores between disadvantaged elementary school children and disadvantaged high school students.

(4) There is no significant difference in self-concept scores between advantaged elementary school children and advantaged high school students.

METHOD

Subjects

There were 707 Ss from an urban school system used in this study - - 309 disadvantaged students (138 in elementary school, 171 in secondary school; 184 boys, 125 girls) and 398 advantaged students (186 elementary, 212 secondary; 199 boys, 199 girls). The criterion of "disadvantage" was defined according to family income (less than $4,000 annually), welfare aid status, and housing in low-rent or subsidized tenements.

Procedure

A variant of the self-perception instrument developed for previous research (Soares & Soares, 1969a, 1969b) was used to measure the self-concept dimension. Forty bipolar traits expressed in sentence form were presented to Ss. An index score was obtained, which is the algebraic sum of the positive and negative traits so checked by the individual respondent.

RESULTS

An analysis-of-variance statistical design was applied to the index scores. It can be readily seen from Table 1 that significance was yielded on all factors except sex and all interaction effects, with most of the significant differences well beyond the .01 level. The descriptive data is indicated in Table 2, giving support for all four hypotheses. Both disadvantaged and advantaged elementary school children scored significantly higher than both groups of students at the secondary level. Also disadvantaged Ss at both levels had significantly higher self concept scores than advantaged Ss in elementary and secondary schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study do not indicate that all disadvantaged children necessarily have negative self concepts. Indeed, they show just the opposite. Not only are they positive but they are higher than those of advantaged children. However, both disadvantaged and advantaged students show a diminishing of self concept at the secondary level from the elementary school level. The change from neighborhood schools to integrated high schools, with their greater competitiveness and less security, may contribut to the lowering of the self concept for both groups.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance Results for Self Concept Scores of Disadvantaged and Advantaged Students

Source of variation	df	Ss	MS	F
Group	1	1,049.02	1,049.02	8.71**
Sex	1	1.00	1.00	ns
Level	1	469.22	469.22	3.89*
G X S	1	1,087.58	1,087.58	9.02**
G X L	1	1,079.36	1,079.36	8.95**
L X S	1	501.94	501.94	4.16*
G X S X L	1	2,033.75	2,033.75	16.87**
Within	699	84,268.13	120.56	
Total	706	90,490.00		

N = 707

*p $<$ .05.

**p $<$ .01.

Table 2

Mean Self Concept Scores,
Standard Deviations, and
Significant Differences
for Disadvantaged Children

Level	Group		Differ.
	Disadvantaged	Advantaged	
Elementary (n = 324)	M = 24.83 SD = 10.18 n = 138	M = 21.25 SD = 8.26 n = 186	3.58**
High School (n = 383)	M = 21.82 SD = 8.55 n = 171	M = 19.01 SD = 9.59 n = 212	2.81**
Differ.	3.01*	2.24*	--

N = 707

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$

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